The linguistic integration of adult migrants and the European Language Portfolio: an introduction

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Introduction and summary

The Council of Europe conceived and developed the European Language Portfolio (ELP) in parallel with the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR). The ELP has complementary pedagogical and reporting functions that make it particularly appropriate for use in language programmes for adult migrants.

Written for decision makers responsible for the linguistic integration of adult migrants, language programme providers and language teachers, this text

- describes the ELP's three obligatory components;
- explains its relation to the CEFR;
- summarises its history to date;
- explores its pedagogical function;
- explains how it can support the linguistic integration of adult migrants;
- introduces the generic ELP for adult migrants developed by the Council of Europe's working group on the Linguistic Integration of Adult Migrants.

What is the European Language Portfolio?

The European Language Portfolio (ELP) is a personal document devised by the Council of Europe to promote lifelong language learning. It supports the development of learner autonomy, intercultural awareness and plurilingualism (the ability to communicate in two or more languages at any level of proficiency).

The ELP has three obligatory components:

- a **language passport**, which presents an overview of the owner's linguistic profile – the language(s) he/she uses in daily life, the proficiency he/she has achieved in second/foreign languages (L2s), his/her experience of using those languages, and any relevant qualifications that he/she has gained;
- a **language biography**, which provides a reflective accompaniment to L2 learning and use, focusing on goal setting and self-assessment, learning strategies, the intercultural dimension of language learning, and plurilingualism;
- a **dossier**, in which the owner collects samples of work that reflect the L2 proficiency he/she has achieved and his/her intercultural experience (the dossier may also be used to organize work in progress).

What is the relation of the ELP to the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*?

The ELP was conceived as a companion piece to the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR),[1] to which it is related in two ways. The first has to do with the Council of Europe's core values and the second with the CEFR's proficiency levels.

The Council of Europe was founded to defend human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Convention on Human Rights (1950) defines the conditions of life to which the individual citizen is entitled as a prerequisite for self-fulfilment. The Convention's focus on the individual is carried over into the Council of Europe's education projects, which are always concerned in one way or another to enhance the individual's capacity to participate as a free agent in the democratic process at local, regional, national or international level. The Council of Europe's modern languages projects are similarly concerned with extending the agency of the individual citizen: language learning is seen as a means of promoting international exchange, whether social, cultural, professional, academic or political. Because language learning is a lifelong process the CEFR recognises the importance of developing the learner's agency *as a learner*: 'once teaching stops, further learning *has* to be autonomous' (CEFR, p.141). The CEFR continues: 'Autonomous learning can be promoted if "learning to learn" is regarded as an integral part of language learning, so that learners become increasingly aware of the way they learn, the options open to them and the options that best suit them' (ibid.). The ELP is designed to support the 'autonomisation' of language learning and language learners.

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[1] CEFR = Council of Europe, *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

The CEFR defines communicative proficiency at six levels – A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2 – in relation to five activities: listening, reading, spoken interaction, spoken production, and writing. The owner of an ELP uses this scheme to assess and report his/her L2 proficiency. The language passport includes the so-called self-assessment grid (CEFR, pp.26–27) and the language biography includes checklists of 'I can' descriptors arranged according to the CEFR's activities and levels.

Use of the ELP by language teachers thus requires some familiarity with the CEFR: its description of language proficiency in terms of language use (Chapter 4) and the competences, including communicative language competences, on which language use depends (Chapter 5). Readers unfamiliar with the CEFR may find it useful to consult 'The linguistic integration of adult migrants and the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*'[2], which offers more detailed information than the present text.

Where did the ELP come from?

Already in the 1980s the Council of Europe's modern languages project began to consider the possibility of developing an instrument that would help to 'democratise' language learning by promoting learner autonomy. An intergovernmental symposium held at Rüschlikon (Switzerland) in 1999 recommended the development of the CEFR and the ELP. A set of preliminary studies[3] presented at an intergovernmental conference in 1997 explored what the ELP might look like in various educational domains. Pilot projects continued this exploration between 1998 and 2000. In 2001 the Council of Europe launched the ELP on the basis of a set of Principles and Guidelines[4] and the first validated models, all of which came out of the pilot projects. From 2000 to 2010 a Validation Committee received ELPs from agencies and institutions in Council of Europe member states and awarded them an accreditation number if they were judged to comply with the Principles and Guidelines. By the end of 2010, when validation was replaced by registration, 118 ELPs had been validated, from 32 Council of Europe member states and 6 INGOs/international consortia. Models had been developed for all educational domains: pre-school, primary, lower and upper secondary, vocational, adult, further and tertiary. Among these 118 validated ELPs four were specially developed to support language learning by adult migrants:

- 13.2001a – Ireland: model for newly arrived adult immigrants learning the language of the host country
- 13.2001b – Ireland: model for adult immigrants who have spent some time in the country and are learning its language
- 14.2001 – Ireland: model for adult immigrants preparing for mainstream vocational training and employment

[2] www.coe.int/lang-migrants
[3] Council of Europe, *European Language Portfolio: Proposals for development*, with contributions by I. Christ, F. Debyser, A. Dobson, R. Schärer, G. Schneider/B. North and J. Trim, Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 1997.
[4] European Language Portfolio: Principles and Guidelines (revised), Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2011.

- 37.2002 – Milestone: model for adult immigrants learning the language of their host country (developed by an EU-funded project with partners in Finland, Germany, Ireland, The Netherlands and Sweden)
- 113.2010 – Norway: model for adult immigrants

The ELP's pedagogical function

When learning is supported by the internet and an institutional intranet, the attractions of an electronic ELP are obvious. The great majority of validated ELPs, however, are paper rather than electronic models; and paper ELPs are likely to predominate in contexts where learners depend on pen and paper to plan and organize their learning. The remainder of this text focuses on paper ELPs on the assumption that language programmes for adult migrants will not necessarily be able to call on the latest forms of technological support. In this section we are concerned with the ELP's pedagogical function in general; the next section focuses on its use with adult migrants.

As we have seen, the ELP was devised partly in order to 'democratise' language learning by promoting learner autonomy. What exactly does the term 'learner autonomy' imply? It certainly does not mean making teachers redundant – when teachers stop teaching, learners usually stop learning. And it does not mean ignoring or abandoning the official curriculum or refusing to work with a prescribed textbook. Learners take their first steps towards autonomy when they recognise that success in learning depends on them: their commitment, their initiative, their effort. Teachers support these first steps by helping learners to reflect on the language learning process: what it demands, how it is likely to proceed, what difficulties they may encounter, what strategies to use in order to overcome problems in communication, how to identify and work on habitual errors, and so on. Becoming an autonomous learner means learning how to learn, and the ELP supports this process.

Before introducing a particular ELP to their learners, teachers need to explore its relation to the official curriculum. Was it developed with this particular curriculum in mind? If it was, perhaps the curriculum uses 'can do' descriptors derived from the CEFR to define its communicative content, which is then restated in the ELP's 'I can' descriptors. But if there is no such link between the ELP and the curriculum, the teacher (perhaps working with colleagues) must find a way of associating the checklists with the curriculum's communicative aims: it is fundamental to effective use of the checklists that goal setting and self-assessment are directly related to official requirements. If – like most language teachers around the world – the teacher intending to use the ELP in her classroom also uses a textbook, she must analyse its content in relation to the ELP. This is partly a matter of linking the communicative aims of the textbook's successive units to the 'I can' descriptors in the checklists. But it also means exploring how the textbook's method and content can be associated with language biography pages that focus on learning strategies, the intercultural dimension of language learning, and plurilingualism.

Most ELPs are presented in a ring-binder, and many of them are very substantial; so if an ELP is given to learners all at once its effect can be intimidating and discouraging. Using the ELP to support teaching and learning is a matter of process rather than product, and the best way of ensuring that the ELP is at the centre of learning is to introduce it in stages. The teacher may start, for example, by introducing the dossier as a way of organising work in progress. In most ELPs the dossier consists of no more than an explanatory title page and a table of contents, which leaves teachers and learners free to create a structure that suits their needs. The dossier may also be used to store realia of various kinds – a comic or magazine bought on a visit to the country whose language one is learning, for example; or in the case of adult migrants, examples of the official forms they are expected to complete. It is important to note that the dossier can accommodate texts in media other than print. Most learners these days have the capacity to take photos or make video recordings, and many of them have access to computers that allow them to save photos and recordings on a disc or USB stick. It is difficult to overstate the motivational benefit of being able to compare one's oral performance now with performances recorded two weeks, two months or two years ago.

Once learners have grown used to working with the dossier in this way, the teacher can introduce those 'I can' checklists that are appropriate to her learners' current level and begin using them to identify learning targets at the beginning and assess learning outcomes at the end of each textbook unit. Some developers provide space beside each descriptor that allows the ELP owner to identify a learning target, record when the target has been achieved, and record also when another person confirms that the target has been achieved, like this:

A1 SPOKEN INTERACTION	My learning target	I can do this	Someone else confirms that I can do this
I can exchange basic greetings and leave-takings	01.09.2010	02.09.2010	02.09.2010
I can ask how someone is and say how I am	08.09.2010	15.09.2010	17.09.2010
I can say who I am, ask someone's name and introduce someone	16.09.2010	17.09.2010	17.09.2010

Other developers allow ELP owners to record (i) when they can do something with a lot of help, (ii) when they can do it with a little help, and (iii) when they can do it without help, like this:

A1 SPOKEN INTERACTION I can do this	With a lot of help	With a little help	Without help
I can exchange basic greetings and leave-takings	01.09.2010	03.09.2010	05.09.2010
I can ask how someone is and say how I am	08.09.2010	09.09.2010	12.09.2010
I can say who I am, ask someone's name and introduce someone	08.09.2010	09.09.2010	12.09.2010

However the checklists are presented, the teacher should not expect her learners to identify learning targets and assess themselves without assistance. Rather, she should help them to explore the kinds of learning entailed by individual descriptors and find ways of persuading a third party that they can indeed perform the tasks entailed by the descriptors they claim to

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have mastered. In other words, goal setting and self-assessment should be firmly embedded in classroom interaction and negotiation. The teacher should launch both processes via whole-class discussion, allow them to continue in small groups, and end by having learners record their learning targets or self-assessment in their checklists.

When learners are used to working with the checklists, the teacher may introduce the language passport. Learners can immediately fill in the details of the language(s) they speak at home and in the community, and they can negotiate their first summative self-assessment by referring to the checklists. The language passport in most ELPs includes this kind of table for summative self-assessment:

Language:		Self-assessment of L2 proficiency					
		A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2
	Listening						
	Reading						
	Spoken Interaction						
	Spoken Production						
	Writing						

Learners will not always be able to claim that they have achieved a full level in respect of a particular activity. For example, they may have mastered the A1 repertoire for reading but only half of A2. In that case they should colour in the A1 cell and half of the A2 cell, writing the date of their self-assessment across the coloured area. The next time they conduct a summative self-assessment of their reading, perhaps after several months, they may be able to colour in the rest of the A2 cell, using a different colour and again writing the date. This technique provides an immediately accessible overview of progress in learning.

The last part of the ELP to be introduced comprises the language biography pages that focus on learning strategies, the intercultural dimension, and plurilingualism. These are differently configured in different ELPs, but it should always be possible to work on them in conjunction with goal setting and self-assessment at the beginning and end of each textbook unit.

It may take a whole school year to introduce the ELP in this step-by-step way, but when the process is complete the teacher will have established it at the centre of teaching and learning. Experience of successful ELP implementation suggests that she can expect better organised work from her learners, enhanced motivation, higher levels of awareness, and better learning outcomes. What is more, when its pedagogical function has been successfully implemented, the ELP can fulfil its reporting function, providing a detailed record of individual learning and evidence of various kinds to confirm learning achievement. At the end of a term or academic year, learners can use the checklists to carry out a summative self-assessment and select those samples of their work that best illustrate what they can do in the target language. Their ELP is then ready to support the next stage in their language learning.

The effectiveness of the above processes is greatly enhanced when they are carried out as far as possible in the target language. The Council of Europe promotes language learning as a

way of enriching the individual's agency; the CEFR defines language learning as a variety of language use; and the ELP offers a means of extending target language use to embrace the reflective processes of planning, monitoring and evaluating learning. These considerations are especially relevant to the situation of adult migrants, who are likely to be taught the language of their host country through that language.

Using the ELP to support the linguistic integration of adult migrants

Language courses for adult migrants that are based on a curriculum and use a textbook can introduce and implement the ELP in the way described in the previous section, though the step-by-step approach may have to be compressed if the course in question is of limited duration. It may also be appropriate to vary the way in which the ELP is introduced according to the level of proficiency that learners have already achieved in the language of their host country. When they have some functional fluency and a strong educational background, for instance, it may be a good idea to begin by introducing the language passport and helping them to use it to carry out an audit of their linguistic resources. An Algerian refugee attending an English course in Ireland, for example, was finding it difficult to make progress and this had a negative impact on his motivation. When he was given an ELP language passport and invited to construct his own language profile, he recognised as if for the first time that he was bilingual in French and Arabic and was also very fluent in Russian (he had carried out his PhD studies in Moscow). Suddenly learning English became much easier, because he recognised that he only needed to learn enough of the language to establish and administer a translation service working between French, Arabic and Russian.

Three features of the ELP give it particular relevance for adult migrants. First, the emphasis on learning how to learn helps to develop an awareness of language and language learning that they can continue to exploit, consciously and unconsciously, after their course has ended – for them, after all, learning the language of the host community will be a lifelong process. Secondly, the goal-setting and self-assessment cycle provides them with a means of subjecting their communicative situation to continuous analysis and helps to maintain focus on their immediate learning needs and reinforce their motivation. In this regard the scaled checklists are especially important if learners are required to work towards an exam related to one of the CEFR levels. Thirdly, the reporting function of the ELP is likely to be especially important to adult migrants. Their proficiency can easily be underestimated by officials and prospective employers, and a well organised ELP can bear effective testimony to language learning effort and achievement.

In many contexts there is no official curriculum to guide the design of language courses for adult migrants and no suitable textbook. In such circumstances the ELP can provide a basis for course design as well as implementation, checklist descriptors being used to define learning objectives and select learning activities and materials. The ELP can also be used to 'democratise' courses: checklists and other parts of the ELP can inform the negotiation of course content and objectives at the beginning of each term, and learners can share responsibility for

deciding on learning activities and finding learning materials (often realia: the official forms, printed instructions, job advertisements, etc. that they must learn to deal with). Such an approach can be of decisive importance in empowering adult migrants, especially those whose previous education has been limited; it helps to make the language course part of the integration process.

Finally, the ELP can be used as an instrument of alternative assessment. If self-assessment is carried out in the way described above and learners are always required to provide evidence that their self-assessment is well-founded, there is no reason why it should be any less valid or reliable than assessment based on a standardised test. This is especially true in those countries that use portfolio assessment in their adult education systems.[5]

A generic ELP for adult migrants

The Council of Europe's working group on the Linguistic Integration of Adult Migrants has developed a generic ELP for adult migrants – generic in the sense that it is designed to be adapted to suit the needs of particular contexts. Based on the so-called Milestone ELP (see p.4 above), it consists of

- A **language passport** of just five pages: the owner's personal details; his/her linguistic and educational profile; a table for summative self-assessment in relation to six languages; the self-assessment grid; and a page on which the owner can list certificates and diplomas.
- A **language biography** in two parts. Part I focuses on the owner's current level of proficiency in the language of the host community; his/her past experience of language learning and contact with other cultures; the trajectory of his/her life so far and aspirations for the future; his/her skills, abilities and interests and the ways in which they can support integration in the host community. Part II focuses on current language learning – expectations, cultural difference, learning how to learn. Many of the language biography pages are designed as worksheets, and it is expected that teachers using the model will concentrate on those pages most appropriate to their purposes.
- A **dossier** with four sections: the owner's current course programme and details; examples of his/her work; a progress record; and diplomas and certificates.
- **Checklists** that include descriptors relevant to the communicative needs of adult migrants are provided for listening, reading, spoken interaction, spoken production and writing at CEFR levels A1, A2, B1 and B2. Users should select those checklists that are relevant to the current objectives of their learners.

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[5] The 'autonomising' practices described in this and the previous paragraph were implemented by Integrate Ireland Language and Training, a not-for-profit campus company of Trinity College Dublin that was responsible for providing intensive English courses for adult immigrants with refugee status from 2000 to 2008. For further details see D. Little, 'Responding to the language needs of adult refugees in Ireland: an alternative approach to teaching and assessment', Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2008.

This ELP is accompanied by a *guide for teachers*[6], which explains how to use each page of the model. The Language Policy Unit of the Council of Europe will be glad to give permission for the translation of the ELP and the *guide* into other languages.

Council of Europe resources related to the ELP

The ELP has its own website: www.coe.int/portfolio. The sections on ELP development and registration are maintained by the Language Policy Unit in Strasbourg, while the section on ELP implementation and use is maintained by the European Centre for Modern Languages in Graz, Austria. The website offers a wealth of documentation related to the ELP as well as supports for ELP developers and teachers who are using the ELP in their classrooms.

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[6] www.coe.int/lang-migrants Section 'Instruments'